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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Fiftieth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 534th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 4 October 1999, at 10 a.m.

Temporary Chairman: Mr. RODRIGUEZ CEDEÑO (Venezuela)

Chairman: Mr. PÉREZ-HERNÁNDEZ y TORRA (Spain)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION (item 1 of the provisional agenda) (A/AC.96/L/L.1)

1. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN declared open the fiftieth session of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

STATEMENT BY THE OUTGOING CHAIRMAN

2. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN said that his two years' membership of the Bureau of the Executive Committee, and especially his visit to Africa in his capacity as Chairman, had given him first-hand knowledge of the day-to-day realities of UNHCR's work in the field. Having seen with his own eyes the tremendous amount of efficient and effective work being done, he was more than ever convinced of the need for timely and adequate financial support for efforts designed to avoid crises and find solutions before situations became unmanageable. In rationalizing its work and making it more dynamic, the Executive Committee should not only fine-tune the existing instruments so as to adapt them to constantly changing situations, but should also bear in mind the close relationship between all aspects of the refugee problem and the need for economic development and social stability. The problem of refugees did not exclusively affect the countries directly involved; it impinged on the safety and security of the international community as a whole.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS (item 2 of the provisional agenda)

3. Mr. SKÖGMO (Norway) nominated Mr. Pérez-Hernández y Torra (Spain) for the office of Chairman.

4. Mr. RODRIGUEZ (Colombia) and Ms. RODRIGUES (Mozambique) seconded the nomination.

5. Mr. Pérez-Hernández y Torra (Spain) was elected Chairman by acclamation.

6. Mr. LEPATAN (Philippines) nominated Mr. Al Khorram (Islamic Republic of Iran) for the office of Vice-Chairman.

7. Mr. DEMBRI (Algeria) and Mr. CAMBIASO (Italy) seconded the nomination.

8. Mr. Al Khorram (Islamic Republic of Iran) was elected Vice-Chairman by acclamation.

9. Ms. BETANCOURT (Venezuela) nominated Mr. Chélia (Argentina) for the office of Rapporteur.

10. Mr. HUHTANIEMI (Finland) seconded the nomination.

11. Mr. Chiélia (Argentina) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.

12. Mr. Pérez-Hernández y Torra (Spain) took the Chair.

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

13. The CHAIRMAN said that UNHCR's fiftieth anniversary offered an excellent opportunity not only to take stock of lessons learned in the past, but also to translate them into future action. In expressing the hope that the anniversary would stir Governments and civil society to renewed efforts on

behalf of refugees the world over, he paid a special tribute to the work being done in the field by non-governmental organizations and stressed the need to convey UNHCR's basic message to all countries.

14. In his view, the Executive Committee's short-term priorities should include international protection issues; the encouragement of accession to the basic conventions; continuing attention to the humanitarian problems arising from the current conflicts in Timor, Africa, the Balkans and the Caucasus; and increased concern with other ongoing conflicts in Asia and especially in Africa.

15. UNHCR's medium- and long-term priorities were essentially two-fold: to continue the process of internal reform that had already begun and to improve cooperation and communication between Governments and civil society, including not only NGOs, but also the media, commercial enterprises and regional and local associations, in transmitting the message of assistance to refugees and in mobilizing the necessary funds.

16. At the present fiftieth anniversary session, the Executive Committee should consider ways and means of giving fresh impetus to its work, possibly by making more frequent use of informal consultations and by conducting seminars and brainstorming exercises on questions of structural or topical interest. The security of humanitarian workers and the promotion of human rights in general and international humanitarian law in particular were two of the main topics he had in mind.

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN ON HIS VISIT TO THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA, ALBANIA AND KOSOVO

17. The CHAIRMAN, reporting on his visit to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo in July 1999, when he had still been Vice-Chairman of the Executive Committee, said that the purpose had been to ascertain facts, exchange views with the authorities of the countries concerned and transmit a message of solidarity and understanding on behalf of the Executive Committee of UNHCR.

18. The humanitarian assistance phase of the Kosovo refugee crisis was scheduled for completion in the spring of 2000. It would merge into the reintegration and rehabilitation phase, which in turn would lead to the stage of economic and institutional reconstruction. The swift-moving nature of the crisis, and especially the mass return of the very refugees who had poured out of Kosovo shortly before, had placed very heavy demands on Governments, international humanitarian assistance organizations and non-governmental organizations alike, thereby immeasurably complicating planning and logistics. The complexity of the relief and reconstruction efforts had also been magnified by the fact that so many refugee host countries had been involved.

19. Most of the refugees had been deprived of identity papers, and that had posed a major problem during the Kosovo crisis. Widespread human rights violations had also been a prime cause for concern. The Kosovo crisis had demonstrated the vital importance of international refugee protection and the need to provide UNHCR with adequate resources to respond rapidly to similar humanitarian crises. The ethnic dimension of the crisis had illustrated the need for reconciliation programmes.

20. The bulk of the Kosovo refugees had been women, children and old people, many of whom had managed to bring money with them. Consequently, the refugees were by no means destitute and, in contrast to what had happened during other humanitarian crises in the past, they had not been decimated by disease or

famine. However, the international community still had a responsibility to provide a regular and predictable flow of resources in order to facilitate planning. The rapid and bewildering succession of events had amply demonstrated the value of adequate forward planning and contingency planning. The establishment of a rapid-reaction task force could be one way to ensure the necessary degree of flexibility.

21. The effective information campaign aimed at returning refugees and the presence of the International Security Force (KFOR), which had eased transport and infrastructure problems, were two specific aspects of the Kosovo refugee crisis which needed to be flagged. But, despite those specific characteristics, the Kosovo crisis also provided wider lessons in the field of intergovernmental and inter-agency cooperation and security measures to protect refugees and humanitarian workers. Continued thought also needed to be given to economic reconstruction and development in the aftermath of humanitarian and refugee disasters.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (agenda item 3) (A/AC.96/L/L.1)

22. The agenda was adopted.

ANNUAL THEME: STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIP TO ENSURE PROTECTION, ALSO IN RELATION TO SECURITY (agenda item 4) (A/AC.96/923)

23. Mrs. OGATA (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the root causes of conflict and displacement often lay in a failure to give due recognition to the aspirations and rights of ethnic minorities or various social groups. Such an approach fuelled separatist claims and exacerbated tribalism, nationalism and ethnocentrism. Separatist success led to retaliations, resulting in polarized societies and the formation of refugee crises.

24. The categorization of groups of displaced people had become increasingly blurred and the growing role of criminal gangs and mafia-like power structures had further complicated the picture. Refugee movements had become a major source of instability and conflict, resulting in a demand for rapid solutions, sometimes at the expense of humanitarian and refugee protection principles and sometimes requiring UNHCR and its partners to work rapidly and simultaneously in countries of asylum and return.

25. In Kosovo, thousands of people had been expelled from their homes in a period of just a few weeks. To address such a large-scale exodus, UNHCR had been forced to resort to services that only the military could provide. Return, occurring just 10 weeks after the outflow had started, had been an even faster exodus in reverse. The principal areas of concern had been logistical problems in Albania and securing permission for refugees to enter the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. To examine the lessons that could be learned from the Kosovo crisis, her Office had launched an independent evaluation of the humanitarian response. However, the fact that so many countries had cooperated in the unique humanitarian evacuation programme had provided a fine example of partnership in ensuring protection.

26. The Kosovo crisis was not over. Almost 1 million people were still without proper housing. They needed to be helped through the winter and UNHCR was working hard with its governmental partners to meet that deadline. More intractable problems had still not been addressed. The Serb and Roma minorities in Kosovo continued to be subject to forced displacement. Although KFOR had helped to curb violence, sporadic attacks had continued. The

minority populations had dwindled to less than half their original number as a result of unacceptable revenge attacks. Ethnic Albanian leaders had to be persuaded that the suffering of the Albanian people was no justification for renewed ethnic cleansing.

27. The bulk of people from the minority communities had fled to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, where they faced an uncertain future in a country crippled by war, economic crisis and international isolation. The international community had an obligation to provide those refugees with humanitarian aid.

28. In the wider sense, the Kosovo crisis had demonstrated that only a comprehensive international effort would enable the Balkans to move from a state of chronic conflict to one of stability, development and progressive integration into Europe. The launching of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe was therefore a welcome development. It was also a cause for concern that 1.5 million people from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia had still not returned home, four years after the Dayton peace accords. Property issues, depressed economic conditions, unemployment and poor infrastructure were currently the main factors influencing the decisions of potential minority returnees. Economic development and job creation were therefore important in resolving the problems associated with displacement.

29. The displacement crisis in both East and West Timor was also of extreme concern to UNHCR. Since the arrival of the multinational force, UNHCR had worked in East Timor as part of an inter-agency team to protect and assist displaced people. Although a UNHCR emergency team was currently working in West Timor, which had recently witnessed an influx of 200,000 refugees from neighbouring East Timor, access to the refugees continued to be difficult and sporadic. Many of the refugees were living in the open. Scarce food, overcrowding and poor hygiene were causing problems and the rainy season was not far off. It was therefore essential to initiate organized assistance for refugees in West Timor before conditions started to deteriorate. The protection and security situation was much more alarming. It was reported that militias had forced people to leave East Timor and others had allegedly been held in West Timor against their will. Such reports were corroborated by the visible presence of armed militia elements among the displaced population.

30. The Indonesian Government should provide all necessary security measures to guarantee the safety of refugees and humanitarian agencies, maintain the civilian character of refugee sites and facilitate humanitarian activities. Refugees should be permitted to make an informed and free choice regarding their future. A UNHCR presence in West Timor was therefore indispensable and its access to refugees must be free and secure. Those proposals had been accepted by the Indonesian Government.

31. The situation of internally displaced persons in Colombia had deteriorated of late, with 3,500 people crossing the border into Venezuela. The refugee situation in Sri Lanka had stagnated following a fresh outbreak of fighting. No progress had been made in the ongoing problem of the 97,000 Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. In Bangladesh, interim solutions for refugees unwilling or unable to return to Myanmar needed to be promoted and accelerated.

32. In Africa, on the other hand, bold efforts had been made to bring peace to the most troubled areas. The Lomé and Lusaka ceasefire agreements had demonstrated Africa's strong desire for peace. However, the implementation of the agreements had become bogged down and old refugee crises were no closer to being resolved. Further progress in UNHCR's preparations for repatriation in

Western Sahara were dependent on developments in political negotiations. Sudanese refugees had continued to arrive in Uganda and Kenya and people displaced by the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea were still awaiting the implementation of the agreement based on the peace framework negotiated by the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

33. In July, she had briefed the Security Council about the refugee situation in West Africa and Central Africa after visiting those regions earlier in the year. Half a million Sierra Leoneans still lived in camps. In Liberia, rebel attacks in areas where Liberian refugees had been returning and Sierra Leonean refugees were hosted might discourage the return home of other refugees or force people to flee again. Guinea had been the target of incursions by rebel forces. In Central Africa, connected and interlinked conflicts were due to coalitions of defeated or disbanded armed groups. As a result, the refugee crisis was worsening in Gabon and the Central African Republic and, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of Congo, fighting might lead to sudden population movements. The situation in Burundi was fragile and the conflict in Angola had generated perhaps the worst humanitarian crisis in Africa.

34. The vast region stretching from the Black Sea to Central Asia was another area of concern. The situation along the southern border of the Russian Federation was especially worrying. Conflicts in Dagestan and Chechnya had displaced tens of thousands of people, but criminal gangs which threatened humanitarian agencies made it risky and difficult to provide the assistance requested by the Russian Federal Government and the Ingush authorities. That assistance would therefore be provided through local networks from the UNHCR's base in Stavropol. In the South Caucasus, there were over 1 million refugees or internally displaced persons in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, but the peace process was deadlocked and the international community's attention was being distracted by other, more pressing emergencies. In addition, genuine support for the refugees' undeniable right to return was sometimes mixed with a wish to make political capital out of their plight. She therefore urged all concerned Governments to support bilateral talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan and to encourage peace negotiations in Georgia.

35. In Afghanistan, the situation was becoming increasingly complicated because renewed fighting had prompted fresh population movements, while Iran and Pakistan were still bearing the burden of 2.6 million refugees, yet humanitarian agencies had little access to areas of internal displacement or refugee return and too little attention was being paid to that area.

36. The plight of refugees throughout the world underlined the importance of improving their protection in emergency situations. Since 1996, UNHCR had made major changes focussing on delegation and decentralization and other needs for improvement had come to light in the process. In 1999, the high rate of deployment of emergency staff had stretched capacity to such an extent that it had become clear that emergency standby capacity at the senior and middle management levels had to be strengthened, mechanisms triggering the early emergency deployment of staff and the handover to longer-term personnel had to be fine-tuned and staff training had to be expanded. The publication in 1999 of the second edition of the UNHCR Handbook for Emergencies was therefore to be welcomed.

37. The overall management of the Office had been streamlined and, closely connected with that reorganization, operations in Africa had been restructured. A comprehensive Operations Management System had been devised

and new software would be introduced to support it. The budget for the year 2000 had been consolidated in a unified structure to satisfy the wish for a clearer presentation of requirements and more transparent reporting on the use of resources and in the hope that Governments would thereby be encouraged to allocate adequate funding in a flexible, timely manner.

38. A new human resources management package would be launched on 1 January 2000. Its aim was to ensure better linkage between job skills, job requirements and the posting system and to introduce a merit-based promotion system. That package was backed up by an ambitious staff development strategy with five core learning programmes, which responded to various recommendations made in past years.

39. The eruption of new types of conflict in Kosovo and East Timor had shown that there was a need to identify the best international method of dealing with them. Since such wars affected regional security, countries in the area had reacted quickly with mixed results, as had been demonstrated by NATO action in Kosovo and ECOMOG's efforts in Sierra Leone. Although InterFET was gradually restoring the rule of law in East Timor, no organized administration had yet been established.

40. Regional initiatives to bring peace to troubled areas were welcome, but the role of the military in humanitarian operations could prove problematical. If the services provided by military forces were well defined, as they had been in Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, they were most useful. In Kosovo, military assistance had sometimes been supplied in order to gain legitimacy and visibility, but it had undermined the coordination and effectiveness of humanitarian agencies and, in some instances, had jeopardized the security of refugees. The military should therefore not be used as a substitute for humanitarian agencies, which alone had the necessary, principled independence from political considerations and the experience and expertise to deal with the human dimension of crises.

41. Kosovo had also shown that, in a high-profile emergency, the operating space of humanitarian agencies had become so overcrowded that their ability to function had been diminished. While Governments were often pressured by public opinion to act swiftly to relieve suffering, emergency action had to be well coordinated and not bypass or duplicate the activities of humanitarian organizations. Furthermore, the amount of aid poured into the southern Balkans was disproportionate when compared with the modest resources supplied by Governments to respond to other equally grave crises in Africa. She therefore requested the Executive Committee to reconfirm its support for multilateral action as a means of avoiding humanitarian micromanagement or bilateralism.

42. UNHCR's core mandate was to protect refugees and search for solutions to their problems. Protection was above all granting asylum to those fleeing persecution and conflict and advocating refugees' rights. The Special European Council Summit in Tampere would provide an opportunity for heads of State and Government to ensure that the European Union's asylum and migration policy was firmly rooted in the full application of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The precedent set in Tampere ought to be visionary and not simply based on minimum common denominators.

43. Asylum was, however, only the first step towards protection, which often required difficult discussions about the implementation of refugees' rights, ensuring that their material needs were met, alleviating their traumas, helping them to become self-sufficient, preventing the hostility of host communities, creating awareness worldwide and paying attention to the most

vulnerable groups. To that end, UNHCR would continue to collaborate with its closest partners: operational agencies within the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and other international bodies.

44. The search for solutions to the plight of refugees had to begin as early as possible and it meant offering them realistic choices and informing them about those choices. To that end, UNHCR had to have full and free access to refugees. It was therefore worried about the situation in countries such as Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in certain areas of Liberia and Sierra Leone, where it had little or no presence, since there was no better way to restore dignity to a refugee's life than to offer him the possibility to make a choice.

45. UNHCR had a precise mandate which could not be replaced by more generic forms of humanitarianism. Whenever international crises caused refugees to flee, the response had to be based on the principles of refugee protection. UNHCR's role as the custodian of those principles had to be respected and its operating space had to be better defined and defended.

46. Mexico and Guatemala had established an exemplary partnership in protection by granting safety, assisting and providing choices to Guatemalan refugees and thus marking the end of the Guatemalan repatriation programme. Mexico had also announced its intention to accede to the 1951 Convention, an example which ought to be followed by the members of the Executive Committee which had not yet signed that key instrument.

47. UNHCR's fiftieth anniversary offered an opportunity to celebrate the courage, resilience and determination of refugees and to take pride in its own ability to help refugees make positive contributions, during the hard period of exile, to the communities giving them asylum, as well as hope and feel that they had a future.

48. Mrs. BELLAMY (Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund) said that the previous half century had been a time of fruitful collaboration between UNHCR and UNICEF on behalf of the uprooted, the poor and the downtrodden, most of whom were women and children, and their shared vision of multilateralism meant that they could move quickly to support each other in providing refugees and displaced persons with stronger protection and in seeking answers to vexed human problems.

49. Indeed, the activities of UNHCR, UNICEF and the World Food Programme had become a model for humanitarian cooperation. The lynchpin of those activities was UNHCR's courageous staff and their unshakeable commitment to helping those in need. Their recent efforts in West Africa, East Asia and the Balkans on behalf of refugees and internally displaced persons were a testament to the skill and vision that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had brought to UNHCR in the past decade.

50. UNHCR had done much to assist refugee children and promote their rights in a context which had changed dramatically since the end of the Cold War. The proliferation of conflicts within States, the routine targeting of civilian populations and the privatization of warfare made possible by a number of negative factors had resulted in horrific violations of human rights and humanitarian law. In those situations, women and children suffered disproportionately. The task of gaining access to the swelling ranks of endangered civilian populations was made all the more difficult for humanitarian agencies by the politicization of the issue. The complexity of today's armed conflicts made a collaborative approach to the protection of

displaced women and children essential, but such collaboration did not relieve States of their responsibility to protect their own civilian populations and to take humanitarian action - or to permit others to do so.

51. United Nations staff were increasingly coming under attack and United Nations property had been looted with impunity. UNICEF was exploring ways of protecting the lives of its staff by providing additional training and equipment and HIV treatment for victims of rape.

52. UNICEF's mandate with regard to refugees was guided by the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and, in all its efforts, it was committed to finding joint strategies to deal not just with the consequences of emergencies, but also with their root causes. Its holistic approach combined humanitarian relief with long-term development objectives which included protection for all children in high-risk situations. That was why it continued to stress the healing powers of education in countries struggling to recover from humanitarian tragedies. The protection of children in armed conflict also had to be based on the provisions of the above-mentioned Convention. UNHCR and UNICEF had to work together to provide such protection as childrens' rights moved higher up the international agenda in anticipation of a watershed event for children in 2001, which would mobilize international leadership in tackling the remaining goals of the World Summit for Children.

53. UNICEF's Peace and Security Agenda for Children set out a number of principles aimed at safeguarding the lives of children in wartime and including them in post-war peace-building efforts. While UNICEF had been encouraged by signs of growing recognition that lasting peace and sustainable development required the fulfilment of the rights of children and adults, it would not regard its endeavours as truly successful until it had secured the well-being of the world's children; stronger collaboration with UNHCR would always form the cornerstone of its efforts to that end.

54. Ms. TAFT (United States) said that, since the last session of the Executive Committee, the world's attention had been focused on Kosovo, where the entire life cycle of a refugee population - from persecution and flight to repatriation - had been compressed into a very short space of time. Then, with peace struggling to gain a foothold in Kosovo, the East Timor crisis had arisen.

55. The most important issue in both East and West Timor was the protection of displaced civilians, concern for which should be the driving force behind the international community's actions. Those wishing to move back to East Timor should be permitted to do so under UNHCR auspices; those requiring protection and assistance should receive it where it could best be provided. Following Mrs. Ogata's trip to Indonesia, it was important that the authorities there kept their promise to cooperate so that assistance activities could begin.

56. She commended the High Commissioner on her leadership and unremitting focus on the needs of millions of refugees throughout the world who still could not return home. Governments must continue to fund shelter, food, health and psychosocial support for those refugees. Her own country had been able to keep up the level of its assistance to less well-publicized areas of the world, such as Africa, where United States contributions accounted for one third of the General Programme requirements; its overall contribution in 1999 would exceed US$ 278 million. The United States remained committed to resettlement as an important element of protection.

57. Partnership for protection had been exemplified in the Kosovo crisis by the partnerships between Governments that offered asylum and those that provided humanitarian assistance and evacuation; between UNHCR and international and non-governmental organizations; and between the humanitarian and military communities during repatriation. Kosovo had provided a demonstration of the durability of the refugee regime and proved that international partnership could work flexibly and quickly. The lessons learned would help the international community to improve its response capability and she looked forward to UNHCR's evaluation of the exercise.

58. Much progress had been made in recent years in addressing the problem of the physical protection of refugees - whether individuals or communities - in camps, for example. The Secretary-General's report on Africa (S/1998/318) had highlighted the problem of refugee security and the need to maintain the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps. Security Council resolution 1208 (1998) could prove an important tool in dealing with the problem of refugee security, emphasizing as it did the need for host countries to develop institutions and procedures to implement the provisions of international refugee law, camps to be located away from borders and refugees to be separated from those who did not qualify for protection.

59. In some cases, camp security problems were so serious that some of the more controversial measures on UNHCR's "ladder of options" needed to be considered, including the use of multinational civilian police, training for the host country's police or for refugees themselves, and the use of multinational forces to protect refugee camps. Resources were always an obstacle, but ways and means must be found to fund such protection.

60. Mr. HUHTANIEMI (Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union and Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, said that recent mass displacements made it more urgent than ever to seek partnerships to prevent, mitigate and resolve acute human suffering and its root causes. The distinction between combatants and civilians had become blurred. Humanitarian assistance was delivered under extremely dangerous conditions and humanitarian access was frequently denied. He therefore welcomed the adoption of Security Council resolution 1265 expressing the Council's willingness to respond when humanitarian assistance to civilians was deliberately obstructed.

61. The European Union once more urged States that had not yet done so to accede to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, which were the cornerstone of refugee protection. However, complementary forms of protection were needed in order to meet present-day challenges such as the situation of displaced persons in complex crises and mass influx situations.

62. Refugee problems needed to be addressed in a comprehensive manner, involving countries of origin, countries of asylum and other affected countries, and encompassing all phases of displacement. States had the primary responsibility for preventing involuntary displacements and creating conditions conducive to voluntary repatriation in safety. Asylum countries were responsible for protecting refugees. UNHCR's mandate was to work in partnership with States to achieve those objectives. The dialogue between UNHCR and European Union States, for example, was proving not only beneficial, but necessary for both sides to fulfil their international obligations. Under article 63 of the Treaty of Amsterdam, the European Union must adopt measures on asylum within five years, including regulations governing the reception of asylum seekers and on the granting or withdrawal of refugee status.

63. A concerted approach to the root causes of displacement was essential in view of the complexity of current refugee movements and population challenges in general. The European Union had established a high-level working group on asylum and migration in an effort to coordinate its concrete actions with the three pillars of the Union - foreign and human rights policies, development and economic cooperation. The working group represented a new level of dialogue and its results could not have been achieved without intensive consultation between UNHCR and the European Union.

64. Regional arrangements also served the purpose of partnership for protection. In the context of the thirtieth anniversary of the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, the European Union remained extremely concerned about the humanitarian situation in many parts of Africa and appealed to the parties to conflicts there to respect human rights and cooperate with humanitarian organizations. Meanwhile, the European Union would make every effort to provide assistance to victims and, in cooperation with the United Nations, was assisting in the field of conflict prevention and resolution. OAU was to be commended for its own work in conflict resolution and for promoting ethics in government, fostering economic cooperation and intensifying the fight against poverty.

65. Cooperation and coordination among international organizations was a major challenge, not only to UNHCR, but also to bilateral donors, agencies and NGOs. There was still insufficient cooperation among United Nations agencies and between donors and NGOs. It should be possible for UNHCR to hand over responsibility for former refugees on completion of repatriation programmes, rather than having to stay on indefinitely to provide protection to returnees. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and humanitarian coordinators on the ground were vital in that regard. IASC was also doing important work in bridging the gap between relief and reconstruction, and with internally-displaced persons. The European Union appreciated the information on IASC regularly provided by UNHCR.

66. He paid tribute to the High Commissioner for her leadership in responding to the enormous humanitarian challenge of the Kosovo conflict. The European Union supported full implementation of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) and the efforts of UNMIK and KFOR in Kosovo. Much could be learned from the experience of creating partnerships in Kosovo. UNHCR's humanitarian evacuation programme had demonstrated the need for a functioning partnership among third countries as well as between those countries and UNHCR, for example. In the post-conflict situation in Kosovo, the four pillars of UNMIK would provide the international community with a basis for partnership in the unprecedented task of reconstructing a society that had literally been torn to pieces. In the delicate situation there, UNHCR, as the humanitarian lead agency in UNMIK and as the organization responsible for protecting refugees, still had problems to address, including the security of returnees and preparations for winter.

67. The crisis in East Timor was far from over. Humanitarian personnel required safe access and he welcomed the Indonesian Government's assurances to UNHCR in that regard. He commended Mrs. Ogata's efforts and the work of UNHCR, ICRC and OCHA in the area.

68. The input and participation of civil society in the search for solutions to humanitarian crises was increasingly important, as was the need for partnership between United Nations agencies and civil society. UNHCR should take advantage of the capabilities of local NGOs, which often had closer

links with host communities and could help in capacity-building and seeking durable solutions. It was also important to work together with refugees themselves and other persons of concern to UNHCR.

69. Special measures should be considered to guarantee the physical safety of humanitarian personnel. The European Union welcomed the special arrangements between humanitarian organizations and national law enforcement authorities, inter alia, for the physical protection of refugees. The Secretary-General had made a thought-provoking statement to the fifty-fourth session of the United Nations General Assembly on humanitarian intervention and his report to the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/1999/957) had been very welcome.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.